Mr. Speaker, last week, America reached a tragic

milestone in Iraq, the 2,000th American died. As of today, nearly 2,030

Americans have been killed in Iraq and a little over 200 in

Afghanistan. In fact, October was the deadliest month in Iraq since

January. I say this not to exploit the grief felt by those families who

have lost loved ones. Rather, I raise this grim milestone because it

should give us, all of us, pause.

Two-and-one-half years after President Bush stood on the deck of the

USS Abraham Lincoln and declared ``mission accomplished,'' the brave

men and women of our Armed Forces are still fighting and dying in Iraq,

worse today than during the actual hostilities, and there is no end in

sight.

There is not a time to debate how we got into Iraq. There is a place

for that. What is more important now is resolving the issues and the

sense of how we have gotten into this quagmire and bring our men and

women home to their families.

It is time the administration finally leveled with the American

people and presented us with a viable strategy towards success and

victory. It is time that the President finally surrounded himself with

competent leaders who can get the job done, rather than cronies and

political operatives interested in advancing a political agenda.

Before the war, General Shinseki said it would take several hundred

thousand troops to secure Iraq. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul

Wolfowitz said his estimate was widely off the mark and General

Shinseki was let go.

Lawrence Lindsey predicted the war would cost hundreds of billions of

dollars. In fact, many ridiculed his estimate and said again he was

widely off the mark, that oil revenues would pay for the

reconstruction.

His predictions were ignored; and $400 billion later, the tab keeps

rising. Some say it will finally cost nearly $1 trillion, this war.

Dick Cheney famously predicted that we would be greeted as

liberators. Let me say, if Iraq treats liberators like this, they have

a funny way of greeting liberators.

Weeks after the invasion of Iraq, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld

fought against increasing the troop levels in Iraq. In fact, months

before the war, he was still debating whether we needed less than

100,000 troops, when those in the Armed Forces were saying we needed

200,000-plus to win that war.

When the looting broke out in Iraq right after the invasion,

Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld replied ``stuff happens.'' Later he

said during the looting,

That was the

Secretary of Defense. That sense of freedom has led to the situation we

have today because we did not create order in that society in Iraq and

a sense of who was in control.

In fact, the Defense Secretary has been flat wrong on countless

occasions, both before hostilities and after the hostilities. I have

lost track of the number of times he has told us that the insurgency

was in its ``last throes.'' On March 30, 2003, regarding the fabled

weapons of mass destruction, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld again:

He has misled us on the number of Iraqis trained to conduct police

and military operations. In September of 2003 he said 55,000 Iraqis

have been trained. Earlier this year, he told us three battalions were

operational. About a month ago, in front of the Senate, we were told

that there was only one operational Iraqi battalion. Imagine that: Mr.

Speaker, $450 billion, a little over 2,000 American lives, over 10,000

Americans wounded, and one operational Iraqi battalion to show for

that, and two elections.

The truth is that the administration's plan for their invasion was

brilliantly planned, but they have failed to plan for the occupation,

costing American lives, our treasury, and our reputation, and all

because of the incompetency of this administration.

Today we are left with a quagmire that has created terrorists and

threatens to destabilize the region.

Let me read you what some of the experts in the Republican national

security apparatus have said. Retired Army Lieutenant General Odom,

former head of the National Security Agency, said the invasion of Iraq

Brent Scowcroft, National Security Adviser to the first President

Bush said:

Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, Colin Powell's former chief of

staff in the State Department, called President Bush's foreign policy

``ruinous'' and said that

The people I just quoted are not exactly the board of moveon.org or

the Democratic Party. These are the pillars and the heads of the

national security apparatus of the Republican Party. These experts are

saying that it is time for a new direction with new priorities when it

comes to Iraq.

We have to get it right in Iraq, but the current path the President

has us on is not the path to success; and it is not simply, as he says,

the choice between doing more of the same and getting the same results

or merely pulling out. Mr. Speaker, $400 billion and one Iraqi

battalion. Some are estimating, as I said, the cost of this war will

get closer to $1 trillion.

It is time for the President to level with the American people and

show us a path to success. We need a performance-based Iraqi strategy.

How many police will we be reduced to this quarter? How many police

will be reduced next quarter? How many Army members will be produced

this quarter, the next quarter, and for the next 2 years,

every quarter this administration has to have a performance-based

policy on police training, on Army training, on civil society

development, on reconstruction, and on the political front so we can

finally, in the President's words, stand down. But having given them

free rein for nearly 2\1/2\ years and we have one battalion

operationally ready to show for it, they have abused the trust of the

American people.

We need to internationalize our operations in Iraq. We need to

convince the world that a stable Iraq is in everyone's interests, and

we need to refocus on stopping terrorism. Mr. Speaker after 2\1/2\

years and more than 2,000 American lives, it is time we adopted a

different strategy, a strategy for victory that will reunite American

families and provide Iraq a stable society. It is time the President

stopped campaigning and began to lead on the issue of Iraq.